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p.1-49 [Common reader: second series] [Donne after three centuries] An enquiry into Donne. 27 p.

p.51-53 [Common reader: second series] [The strange Elizabethans.] Fragment. 2 p.

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Notes on Donne
Letter to a Young Poet
Some Elizabethans

N.Y.P.L.

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An Enquiry into
~~Notes on~~ Donne.

Tis a strange thought ~~that words written three hundred~~
years ago ~~are~~ able to
When we think how many million million words have been
written & published in England ~~since the year~~ in
the past three hundred years — ~~how many millions~~ of men
~~have cried out at the tops of their voices.~~ & ~~have~~ & have died out
~~wrong~~ without having any ~~one~~ distinct sound at all,
it is ~~strange~~ tempting to wonder what qualities the words
of Donne possess that we should still hear them
distinctly today. Far be it from us to suggest ~~that~~
~~the poems of Donne~~ Even in this year of the
celebration & pardonable adulation, that the poems ~~of~~ look over
Donne lie any popular reader upon every table, or that the girl in the tube is her shoulder
reading Donne as she returns from her office. But he is
is to be discovered
read — he is audible — to that fact new Editions, ~~&~~ frequent
articles, ~~both~~ testify & it is tempting to try to
analyse the sound that his voice makes as it
strikes upon the ear, after this long flight through the
ages, after ~~the~~ its troubled passage across ~~such~~ the wide &
stormy seas that separate us ~~the~~ from the ~~age~~ Elizabethan ~~age~~.
To the poet, & to the scholar, Donne presumably
means something ~~which~~ that he cannot possibly mean to
the common reader. ~~There are, as Dr Johnson~~
~~remarked~~, higher & lower orders among writers, ~~the poets~~
the tragic poets are the aristocrats, & the prose
writers are the ~~per~~ just as there is a hierarchy
among writers, ~~so to~~ the poets constituting the Lords
& the prose writers the Commons, so among readers
we have to recognise the fact that some bring a trained
specialised faculty to work upon what they read, &

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Either as poets discriminate in poetry the ~~pe~~ ~~qualities &~~
the peculiar qualities that distinguish poetry — its metre, its
~~so~~ melody — ~~its~~ & all its complex & ~~delicate~~ difficult technical
~~powers~~, qualities or as scholars ~~recognise~~ its accurately take its
bearing in relation to other poetry & to other languages. But
many read Donne without any such aptitude. And if he
means something real & distinct & necessary to them after
all these years it may be worth while to ask what
it is that he means, since his life, & the life of all poets
must largely depend upon their power to entice into
ordinary hours, & make the ordinary reader rise & go
to the bookcase, & spend an hour, now & again,
~~reading them~~ absorbed in their works.

But is it not Donne's meaning that attracts us first/: it is the
explosion, the ~~violent &~~ ~~violence & sudd~~ ~~suddenness,~~ the being
~~violence~~, ~~as if a he~~ with which he bursts ~~upon us~~. into ~~the~~ speech
~~silence~~. ~~stored & suppressed~~, ~~but~~ ~~his lines~~ he bursts ~~As~~
as if he could no longer suppress himself.
~~Gradual~~ All ~~the approaches seem~~ ~~obliterated~~. And
Nothing ~~is prepared or led up to~~. Other ~~poets~~ ~~that~~ persuade,
the explosion startles ~~is us~~ ~~there~~ the ~~are not~~ his
to charm, to insinuate gradually; he on the contrary seems urged to poetry ~~by some~~ & leaps into it
~~irrepressible passion, which~~ to with some violent statement
~~with~~ the shortest way
in which it consumes all preparations.

all preface & were

I long to talke with some old lovers ghost — he leaps in. or

Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harme
Nor question much
That subtile wreath of haire, which crowns my arme —

Take heed of loving mee,
At least remember, I forbade it thee

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Stand still, & I will read to thee
A Lecture, Love, in loves philosophy —

Stand still — that expresses the attitude which he demands, &
which we grant instinctively. And does in that momentary
pause, ~~that~~ when we undergo the first shock of this
concentrated passion which it is vain enough to try to
analyse. Is it caused by artful melodies,
by the chime of sound with sound, by the establishment of
~~some~~ rhythm? Do we feel suddenly rooted &
arrested as we should be by the apparition in our
path of some wild contorted figure, who, without
preface or preamble, stammers his curse & his
exclamation wrung from him by ~~what~~ some
experience ~~which~~ unknown to us? Explain it as we
will, justify it by what we can find out later of
Donne's life, this shock, this moment~~ary~~ of standing
& letting the shock reverberate thro' our nerves
still remains of paramount importance. And
later, as we read on, we feel, that ~~[illegible]~~ exciting
intensification, as if perceptions that had been
numb & torpid quivered into being; all the
nerves of sight & sense become alert; & the
'bracelet of bright hair' burns in our eyes;
& we become aware, not only of details of
sensation, but of ~~a whole~~ being compelled to a
whole attitude of mind; of feeling tense &
aware of ~~the~~ some complex beauty, horror, despair which
~~was~~ dissipated in the usual ~~[illegible]~~ traffic of life,
becomes under the stroke of Donne's passion,
solid & intelligible — ~~a view~~ & so compelling that for
the time being we can admit no other.
In this power of suddenly capturing & surprising
the reader, Donne no doubt excels most poets.

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this is his characteristic quality. Soon, as the first impression is mixed with others. Other curiosities & complications intervene. But that sudden shock, which we cannot analyse, which no critic however eloquent or subtle, can interpret for us, is the heart of poetry; the electric power lodged in language, which makes words able to transmit their force across time, from one mind to another. ~~The~~

But with Donne of course, ~~however~~ the shock ~~violent~~. though violent is soon ~~[illegible]~~ dispersed ~~into a~~ in a multitude of other impressions which can be dealt with more coldly calmly & with ~~more~~ some help from the reason. Donne does not stay true. But the very next moment he takes his emotion & submits it to the teasing & testing of a most subtle, erudite & self-conscious intelligence. We no longer stand ~~at~~ still; we are driven hither & thither into all the crannies, corners of our intelligence, of our brain, in the effort to follow the twists of his thought, often losing, in the process, touch with the central intensity. The iron that seemed red hot, is hammered upon till it is cold & intricate & fretted with the most curious traceries. And while this process is taking place, while we are trying to understand the ~~curious~~ what Donne means, we begin scribbling in the margin of the mind a number of suggestions & questions, some of which will lead out almost out of hail of the satire or the Elegy or the Epithalamion which lies then before us.

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~~He differs from most poets in being a thinking poet.~~
Soon/we are straining to follow his meaning, ~~& with very little~~
& the task is strenuous, because of the shock & the surprise
are present, the lure, the enchantment ~~[illegible]~~ run dry. ~~the miraculous~~
~~miracle which~~, ~~in~~ Shakespeare for example, ~~so often~~
was a thinking poet, ~~but~~ & his sonnets are ~~also~~
put a strain on the reasoning powers; but again &
again the state of mind is ~~illuminated~~ struck on ~~some~~
by ~~some tremendous~~ a phrase, ~~& and~~ the analysis
embodied. ~~Music & substance~~ thought is embedded in
music & substance. Donne too in his Elegies ~~expressed~~
~~told the story of~~ a man following the course of a
thwarted & complex passion. But ~~how the difficulty~~ of
this ~~followed~~ trace ~~so~~ with such ~~austerity of language~~,
~~such~~ a bare niggardly supply of words, with such ~~an~~
~~effort to~~ effort & contortion & ~~determination~~ ~~tough~~ grim
determination to resist the voices sirens, that ~~the woman~~
we have ~~to squeeze our minds through a~~ to compress
our minds to ~~follow his~~ squeeze through the narrow
channel open to us; & the figure of the lady, who move
~~is somewhere behind the barrier of words~~, is to be seen only
in snatches, & angles.

in such
a chequered
light behind

The Satires ~~for example~~ ~~are~~, Professor Grierson tells us,
~~the~~ are early ~~early~~ work, the work of a boy, & ~~it is not difficult to~~
the signs of youth are evident — ~~the~~ its recklessness, its
high spirits, its ~~some~~ the ~~confident~~ untried confidence which
~~leads it to suppose that~~ the young, comes out in the first year bulging; & ~~fixed~~
~~seeing~~ life of & fantasy very bright & very close, suppose that its
follies & iniquities & stupidities can be whacked into
shape with a smart single blow of the pen. In this
~~belief~~ arrogance & intemperance Donne was
typical of youth. But as we read we cannot
~~help concluding~~ ~~begin to suspect~~ that the young man
~~who~~ was not typical altogether of his age.
~~There is a hard~~ He ~~has~~ writes as if his back were
up, not merely against what displeases his elders to

his ageing

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& flouts
these usages
by a
certain
~~natural~~
a deliberate
defiance.

to call ~~reason &~~ rhyme & reason, but against the whole trend of his
time. There is a wilful harshness, an ~~intentional~~. Some
~~unusual contraction~~ & something wilfully contracted
harsh, abrupt, as if Donne were not only speaking the truth as
he saw it, but speaking against the convention of his ~~a~~ time
He has means the arrogance of the young, the desperate, & unlovely ~~insincerity~~
bareness of those who would purposely refuse to avail
themselves of the current ~~lineal~~ usages: ~~We feel~~ the
same harshness in the early poems of Browning. And
~~we cannot~~ Here then we ~~turn~~ shut the book for a moment
to ask what Donne was ~~up against~~ — ~~to~~ current
Donne was fighting against; what were the influences tempted him, &
had to be trampled under foot.

If then we imagine ourselves in Donne's place, about
the year ~~158~~ 16~~70~~, 93 — we have to imagine ourselves in
what we should now call, ~~from the~~ the height of the
Elizabethan age. The Faery Queen, Sidney's Arcadia,
Marlowe's plays, the early plays of Shakespeare,
~~might~~ would all have stood upon ~~his~~ the shelves, — &
in the taverns & where ~~clever~~ young ~~men~~ writers met
the talk would have been of the theatre, of
fame of the American voyages, ~~of~~ & of ~~all those~~ the possibilities of
~~several~~ of English literature, & how to import into it
the grace & splendour of Italy & Greece.
But in order to give substance to this generalised &
so easily too airy & fanciful ~~an~~ impression — of for
an age so far distant, ~~&~~ is inevitably picturesque, —
let us open one of those obscure writers who
testify more truly because more humbly to the general
temper of the age than the great masters themselves.
About the end of the sixteenth century there ~~flourished~~
lived an obscure man of letters, called William
Webbe who spent his summer evenings of 1586
in writing some reflections upon English poetry.

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Although he was without much gift for writing poetry himself ~~he took~~ ~~poetry~~ the art of poetry ~~with~~ extreme was to him of Extreme interest, but of a ~~peculiar~~ interest, ~~because~~ which at once seems to us peculiar because it is largely fixed ~~an content~~ upon what ~~in~~ what is to come, ~~far~~ more than in what has been. (Much in the same way ~~would~~ as are the Americans now discussing the future of American literature. ~~He~~ had a) To Webbe, the English were still a an untried race who had still to make good their claim ~~that~~ to that they too could write poetry, could be admitted to the society of literate races. They were a young, an inexperienced race. He knew of no memorable poem in English until twenty years past. ~~They~~ their tongue ~~wrote English~~ was a coarse base ~~Dialect, without~~ & it their poetry hitherto was innocent of all polish & unharnessed in noble metres. But he could not doubt but that there 'were as Quick wits in England as in Greece' & that they ~~would~~ were capable of developing into poets given the training. ~~Early~~ ~~Euph~~ Lyly in his opinion was doing a noble work in ripening, & polishing & ~~in~~ our rude dialect & extending its capacities.

But what makes him a man of his own time & not of ours is that his interest is in the future of poetry, & not in the past. In ~~our~~ own England today ~~for instance~~, the critic is frequently to be found raging like Sir Edmund Gosse that poetry is finished, the art dead. To Webbe the English had still to show that they were capable could write poetry. All was to come. Nothing had yet been done. He knew of 'no memorable poem by an Englishman until twenty years past'. There was no reason why they should not write poetry for he believed that there were as quick wits in England as in Greece; but at present the language was coarse, they needed experience; they needed

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learning: they needed to imitate the Greeks & Latins, & to they needed to stretch & polish & enrich their native tongue; ~~& th~~ as Lyly ~~was doing, much to weather~~ as Lyly was doing & then, so he confidently believed 'the rabble of bald rhymes shall be turned to famous works'. ~~If we turn~~ wander to Puttenham, we hear — said it is the same thing. ~~The English may in time become poets~~; He also stands with his eyes fixed on the future, surveying ~~st~~ an undiscovered but possible country. ~~If we dip into~~ Gabriel Harvey, ~~And both these obscure writers indeed~~ Wherever we open, among the obscurer Elizabethan prose writers, we find not only ~~an~~ this hope, this admonishment exhortation to discover, to experiment, to learn of the ancients, to make English a fit medium for poetry, but the most convincing evidence that they were putting their theories into practice. The Elizabethan prose writers ~~are almost suffocated in the~~ in their determination to enrich & spoil ~~& stretch &~~ the bald dialect of their native tongue created a speech that could hardly be used for ordinary purposes; that crushed & suffocated meaning in its folds. Lyly's Euphues shows tempting to shuffle of this is the ~~[illegible]~~ notorious example. But ~~now~~ the ~~un manner had waked~~ ~~the manner had~~ ~~it was not merely an isolated~~ But it was not only the cultivated literary craftsmen who were thus obsessed.

how thoroughly this ~~pattern~~ style cd. be worked.

Historians, pamphleteers, journalists, men that is who were writing often in a hurry, often in a rage, men who wanted to persuade & amuse & make money out of ~~simple~~ the simple public ~~took~~ used this bounding & curvetting speech, these hyperboles, these metaphors, which nowadays might grace the peroration of a Prime Minister's ~~oration~~; speech; & even then would draw a smile if read in cold print next morning. Dekker for

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~~instance wants to say that Queen Elizabeth died in the spring,~~ Dekker, ~~attempting a~~ recording the events of the year 1603 of which we would the plain chronicle would have been of priceless value to us, ~~is overwhelmed at the outset by the~~ seizes fact that the Queen died in March, to indulge in a stupendous description of spring:

In short the Queen died, and if we are asking Dekker ~~for~~ what the old woman who swept his room for him said on that occasion, what in fact the look of Cheapside was that night, or any other literal & exact question; for ~~had he wished, he could~~ not have told us. ~~And yet~~ ~~All he could say~~ It is ~~natural~~ The last was of course a king to ~~make speech sonorous~~, sweeping, ~~rich &~~ & though he could swoop, with the true Elizabethan gusto upon some dunghill, could brawl & bawl & be as bawdy & plain spoken & hearty & frank as Shakespeare or Chaucer, the middle tone of human speech — that which we use in talk, in narrative, in analysis — was unknown to him.

if one happened to be out in the thick of the crowd.

Thus if we go back to Donne's satires, if we try to fancy ourselves in his shoes ~~in his predicament~~ about the year ~~[illegible]~~ 1593 we may suppose that he found himself in something of a predicament.

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~~as~~ we know from the first Satire he was a boy with a
great love of reading. His bookshelf contained grave
Divines, & Aristotle', & 'Jolly statesmen' & Chroniclers, &
"Giddie ~~fantastique~~ fantastique Poëts of each land".
The mind that he was going to bring into action was
a mind that had sharpened itself upon some very hard
~~flinty~~ flints. ~~But~~ And it was ~~And But the mind~~
that picked out these particular ~~And when we know~~
~~what a mind feeds upon we know something about the~~
~~nature of that mind.~~ ~~Now Donne~~ But, far from choosing merely
Euphues & Marlowe & Spenser & the early
Shakespeare to feed upon he chose instead
some 'Grave divines' & Aristotle, & some 'Jolly
statesmen' & chroniclers, & "Giddie & fantastique
poets of each land." And when we know what ~~a~~
~~some~~ mind feeds upon we know something about the
constitution of ~~that~~ mind. Clearly Donne was
turning away from his natural pastures. ~~Clearly~~
he found it necessary to sharpen his powers upon
something hard, ~~the writers~~ theologians, philosophers, men
who deal with facts. If he read "Giddie fantastique but of foreign countries
poets" they were ~~not~~ of ~~each~~ land, not only his own land.
~~For he was aware that his mind was not~~ what he was
going to say ~~was not~~ required that discipline.
~~Already he was aware that~~ It would not lend itself
to the expansive & mellifluous style that was
surging & swelling all round him in England.
His ~~the~~ satiric temper, his rational turn, his
argumentative, analytical mind could not find in the
~~style that was~~ prevail prevailing style ~~that natural~~
~~of~~ a garment which it could wear naturally, & if
not unconsciously then with a curious & childlike
delight in its splendour & brightness. What he had to

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✗ L there among the ages
without having
[illegible]

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ity demanded a style of his own, & that is a predicament to find
oneself in, at the age of twenty or so when all the world
to a new | yields your obedience to a different ~~its dictates~~ a wonderful formula.
a scholar | Donne further [illegible] He travelled, saw foreign countries, ~~met men of affairs~~,
took part or such part as a Roman Catholic might, in
public business, & thus developed still further ~~his~~ his the depths & angles edges depths of
idio | an angular ~~idiosyncratic view, a~~ own ~~personality~~
idiosyncracy. ~~And so when we come to the love poems~~ —
As | ~~for it~~ was inevitable, ~~that~~ the boy with the bold yet subtle
face, greedy & sensual, yet sensitive & nerve drawn,
should fall in love violently & soon — ~~that we~~
[illegible] when we come to those ~~curious~~ cryptic, half
strangled, poems, which for all their repression,
seem to spurt forth such high jets of passion,
that we realise how queer a temperament was trying
to find ~~expression for itself in its own words~~, an expression for its own passion in its own way
Nothing should have been easier than for an Elizabethan
poet to write love poems. Everybody was doing it.
the beautiful figure of the maiden whom the
Elizabethan loved is still apparent to us. She was
made of alabaster & ivory; of cherries, cream, &
She was short at & fickle, delightful & complaisant. | golden wire. Music was in her voice, & stateliness in her
walk. Besides ~~she was very~~ being beautiful, & very real into the
bargain; ~~there was life in her veins as well as~~
for no ideal can prevail & inspire without
+ blood in its veins. ~~But~~ unfortunately for Donne,
his love was of quite a different stamp.
She was brown & rather than fair, ~~wizened~~ & lean rather than plump, &
difficult & often too ~~fickle, &~~ & stupid & yet clever, &
nervous & ~~complex~~ full of contradictions — in
short she was a complex creature, & married into the
bargain to an invalid in a basket chair
the lady, whoever she may have been, was obviously a

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real person & the roused in Donne all the discords & violence &
unreason that lay hid in him. And yet how to express them? What
method, what strain, lent itself to these complicated feelings,
these browns & greys, ~~that needed so much~~ that was more
seductive than white, the stupidity that was more expressive
than glibness. He hated; he loved; he reviled; he adored; he felt.
~~described the brown & the lean~~ how describe the brown & the
lean ~~with~~ ~~when~~ in an age of whiteness & plumpness, how
keep close to ~~hate & disgust & the complicated mixture of~~
~~hate & love, ecstasy & disillusionment~~ which ~~love~~ ~~inspires~~
~~a real~~ ~~which~~ ~~to the changing~~, to the contradictory feelings
~~which a~~ to hate & contempt & ecstasy & disillusionment &
~~all the changing & contradictory feelings, which are~~ the
which compose the true state of ones mind in an age
which swept over such distinctions in great bursts of
metaphor & melody?

That Donne did keep close to his own state of mind
is one of the reasons why, after all these years, we still
~~find this an unexhausted fascination but~~ find his
fascination unexhausted. ~~What does he mean, we ask~~?
~~As we try to~~ ~~He has not succeeded in making his~~
~~meaning plain.~~ There is a lump of meaning
hidden in his verse which ~~attracts us~~ draws us with its glitter through
the briars & brambles. ~~What~~ We do not
understand his emotions, in the sense that we could write a
~~commentary~~ it out in different words, but we feel — &
of very few ~~lovers~~ love poets could we say this — that
~~his experience is sharp surprising as real as our own~~,
the obscurity is partly caused by the difficulty which perplexes the poets & that his feelings are
& ~~the~~ something that ~~he~~ do ~~but~~ not himself hard
that to him ~~too who felt it, this~~ ~~enigmal~~ a Enigmatic,
& obscure & alarming & of absorbing interest. to him as to us
Often indeed one feels - & the fact that the poems were
not published encourages the idea - that his ~~lo~~ love
poems were written to explain his ~~own~~ state of mind
to himself, ~~rather than~~ not to make a poem for the -

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The love of
Change

Are not the body
one lover, but one
must enjoy the body.

10 & Fate cathedrals,

ow

For if the shining thread
may have let fall

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With burning of eye we ~~know~~ no
more know

Is the one
or is the
many? —

public to enjoy. Hence ~~there is often~~ the use of shorthand
phrases which we cannot decipher; hence the sense we
get ~~not of~~ a of a woman's figure — & then not always the same —
passing ~~far away almost hidden~~ in the distance,
obscured by frequent obstacles, going in & out of deep
shadows & bright sunlight. For how splendidly &
brightly, like a fire that has suddenly consumed a
a mass of coal, ~~at~~ flames Donne's passion in a few lines of
blazing & burning significance! But for some reason,
partly
either in their circumstances, or in the nature of things,
their blaze & unity are baffled, thwarted; body & soul
seldom unite; all is war & discord; until at last he
beats out ~~a~~ ~~that~~ here in the stanzas of the famous
poem which begins Where, like a pillow on a bed.
~~some transcendental~~ a philosophy, a sentiment, some
possible explanation; finds, after all this tumult, an
end, a ~~tranq~~ tranquility, consummation; calm.
a state of being which is tolerable both to body & mind.

Is it for this reason — that he is complex & tortured &
divided, ~~& that we~~ & introspective — that we hail
him as a contemporary, ~~&~~ while other & possibly
greater poets seem to us like beings caught ~~up~~ in
another world where they exist immune from our
perplexities? Or, if there is something ~~faked~~ ~~in~~
in ~~of the professional hack~~ ~~in this statement~~, specious & exaggerated
who ~~must, in order to make his give his article a~~
~~backbone emphasise fashion &~~ in the statement —
for ~~personal~~ ~~Are always tempting to~~ make out
some trace of that desire to ~~Emphasise~~ ~~differences~~
~~between the fashions outlines differences for the~~
~~sake of argument where none exist~~, — make
distinctions emphatic where they are ~~extremely~~
subtle, in order that we may state a case, even
if by so doing we exaggerate, falsify & lose the

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Sense of fact – Lit must be admitted that Criticism is sick of
these false distinctions, these unreal affinities & distastes,
fashions & schools imposed upon us by the critics,
still perhaps there is a grain of truth in this statement.
~~We are accustomed~~ The novelists have accustomed us to
think out about our minds & bodies. ~~We are~~
Prose has provided us with an instrument for
gauging our intricacy. We are perhaps less
prudish, & perhaps more analytical than our
immediate forbears. Hence we feel that Donne is
talking ~~about thing that interest us, & his~~ a
we ~~follow his moods,~~ for saying bare something
true, deep, exciting, important: the story of his heart
his effort to ~~be~~ be exact with himself. his vision, his
twists & turns of passion – his intricacy – are
to our liking, excite in us our detective faculties,
rouse ~~the~~ sympathy, & all those alternations of
dislike or interest which are the life blood of reading.
How the poems live under our eyes! He was a
man, we say, who was conscious that he was an
exception. As he grew up he found himself not ~~at~~ all of the
stock pattern. For one thing he was changeable. He
loved variety. He was curious about all sorts of
experiences. And his mind was perpetually bringing in
in fresh trophies: ~~There was no~~ Nothing was
sealed up & hidden from it. And yet this voyaging
free & adventurous intelligence was suddenly
attacked by the oldest & the most universal of
sensations. He loved. But then as the machine
was so & curiously constructed, it worked unexpectedly.
~~Every part was~~ Through every part his brain let fall
a 'sinewie thread' But not simply & entirely.
He ~~could be~~, even, fierce & irresistible & unfettered
could be despised. Jealousy could torture even such a

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man as he was. And fate could interfere. And he could be forced to
conceal his love; & ~~it made everything~~ intensified every power
both good & bad in him. And he could not control himself.
And the satisfaction he got was imperfect. His body wanted one
thing: his mind another. And yet there were moments of
triumph. "Here upon Earth, we're Kings, & none but wee
Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects bee; Who is
so safe as wee? where none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two! And women are
incapable of love; & the body is not enough.
& nakedness is everything: but concealment is necessary:
& the everlasting, the constant, are necessary: & change too. &
"'Change' is the nursery
Of musicke, joy, life, & eternity"; & the body is
disgusting; & yet necessary. & there is nothing in the whole
world so beautiful, so perfect as a woman
to form again, ~~differently~~, for this was not a mind to
grow slothful & content ~~to repeat itself~~. ~~with~~ to say the same
thing, to shut its eyes & sleep.

The lover has sung his song, & then who comes? Somebody
very strange; somebody, for all our boast that we
feel akin to Donne, & can understand his complexity
who is as far removed from us as the cramped
diamond paned, dark & damp Elizabethan house is
removed from a modern residence with ~~hot water~~
running water in all the bedrooms, electric fires, &
a loud speaker informing us ~~of~~ in the heart of the
country of what is happening in all the capitals of
Europe. For all his passionate sincerity, Donne
was not a disembodied intelligence. His 'naked
thinking heart' was embedded in a body & ~~that body~~ ~~and~~ that
which had to live the life of its own time.
The Elizabethan age ~~was~~ imposed some strange
restrictions, upon its poets ~~cramped & distorted its poets~~ is undeniable.
upon the intelligen

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~~affected~~ pressed upon
~~And after all the~~ that life closed about & ~~so~~ distorted the
intelligence as surely as the house, with its little ~~ventilation~~
its rooms, & darkness & damp bred fevers & plagues & made ~~the~~
~~deaths life of children~~ vast families die ~~wait~~ ~~not in childh~~
unable to weather the difficulties of childhood. The
~~time spoilt of Donne~~ ~~The passi~~ Passion & sincerity
were grossly ~~mixed with~~ ~~suffused~~ & were ~~distorted into~~
adulation; How preserve passion & sincerity in an age
which demanded adulation & hyperbole of its writers if they were to
live at all? ~~Our own public~~ ~~Our own public~~
~~may be course of~~ Whatever the faults of our own
public taste, it ~~is~~ does not demand that our
foremost poets shall ~~waste their powers in~~ squander &
~~covet~~ their powers & crack the ~~in praising the~~ upon the ~~d~~
~~Daughters of Earls who have died young.~~ upon the deaths of
~~the daughters of Earls~~; ~~praises~~; upon little girls who
~~died~~ whose fathers ~~were~~ have it in their power to
present the poet with a house, upon great ladies who
have influence at Court, upon ~~him~~ any man or
woman of rank, in short, ~~who will~~ because
they ~~alone are able~~ have the fortunes of poets
in their hands, & with, in return for so many
lines of fulsome adulation, secure him a
living, a house, a place at Court — something with which
to support his ~~large~~ family ~~upon~~, which is, as ~~the~~
all families then tended to be, ~~large, impecunious~~,
& was large & quite unprovided for. ~~Such~~ a
~~poem as Donne wrote upon Elizabeth Drury would~~
That any poet today should be capable of writing such a
poem as Donne wrote upon Elizabeth Drury is
unthinkable; & Donne was not any poet but a
~~man of~~ ~~an~~ a ~~sardonic bitter tongued~~ man marked
for his boldness, his intolerance of convention; his wit, his

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savagery, his hatred of courtiers & his posture. — Moreover, he had fallen on evil days; had married secretly; had missed preferment; was a Roman Catholic, was the father of a family, & hence must set to & write to say that the whole world has come to an end since Elizabeth died; that the sun has gone from the world, & from the sun; & all is over for ever, & all he hopes for henceforth is to live to praise her, & his praise ~~[illegible]~~ shall be that he praised her, & so on, & so on" ~~The~~ to

Shee to whose person Paradise adher'd,
As Courts to Princes, shee whose eyes ensphear'd
Star-light enough, t'have made the South controule,
(Had shee beene there) the Star-full Northerne Pole . . .
229 Shee, shee is gone; . . . .

since Shee, shee is gone, & Donne wants a roof over his head.

~~Whether~~
The ~~social~~ system of patronage which could draw such a poem from such a poet is so curious that we are tempted to see if we can get by coming closer to those potentates who controlled it. The patrons who seem to have had most influence upon Donne, were women — Magdalen Lady Herbert, (Mrs Danvers) the Countess of Bedford; who ~~&~~ as women, left ~~but~~ little the record of themselves behind. ~~But Lady Anne St Clifford~~ Save ~~that~~ the reflection ~~[illegible] is~~ ~~necessarily~~ distorted, which they cast upon the minds of ~~their~~ grateful poets.

chiefly great ladies, & the Ctss of Huntingdon

But Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke & Montgomery was a sturdy diarist & annalist; she spoke at [illegible] left a mass of documents behind her, & may serve as the type of the great Elizabethan lady, ~~with~~ who played ~~the part that~~ much the same part in the literary life of her time that the circulating libraries play now. ~~The~~ ~~To her~~ Fame. She was the ~~dispenser of~~ prosperity were in her gift.

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channel through which poets might approach the Court, might
win office, might attain perhaps that independence of the great
which ~~even~~ Shakespeare could ~~f~~ desire as if even
Shakespeare had been at their mercy.

Like Magdalen Herbert & the Countess of Bedford, Lady
Anne, the daughter of a Clifford & a Russell, was born ~~into the~~
in the centre of ~~the~~ that web of ~~small closely related group~~ of
great families ~~whom~~ already woven ~~together~~ closely together
by two or three centuries of intermarriage. Presumably she
enjoyed the best education of her time, but the best
education for a girl ~~was strictly limited~~ was ~~not~~
practical rather than literary. She "was not admitted
to learn any language, because her father would not
permit it"; but she had the poet Daniel for a tutor,
& ~~was~~ denied Latin & Greek & Italian & even French,
~~accounted what literary gifts she had~~
~~Concentrated all the more~~ perhaps upon her mother tongue.
~~And since reading was~~ ~~the fact that no pressure was put on~~
without being a bookworm, ~~still less~~ a blue-stocking,
books ~~English literature~~ ~~was~~ represented ~~to her seat to her~~, ~~something~~ she read
loved, needed, & used, not at all for purposes of display,
~~but as a part of~~ or vanity but as a healthy
person eats; naturally, eagerly, & with that kind of
good taste & ~~sense~~ natural sense of what is
good literature, which comes easily in a society
that ~~takes~~ makes literature ~~into~~ a part of its daily active life. The great
ladies at that time would act in a masque by
Ben Jonson. A ~~g~~ girl who had learnt her part,
would pass on without any sense that she was
peculiar or ~~in~~ a target for ridicule to read the
Faery Queen or Sidney's Arcadia, ~~& thus~~
as Lady Anne did. ~~Grown to woman's estate,~~ &
then later, even though reading would play little part in
the life of a ~~great heiress~~, a young wife, married to a
great nobleman, & not only mistress of his estates, but the

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Claimant to still vaster possessions of her own, she still loved reading
as she stitched
She had Montaigne read aloud to her; & returned again to the
Faery Queen; ~~but Chaucer was her favourite poet~~. &
~~which~~ ~~B~~ But Chaucer was perhaps her favourite.
~~which~~ she read to [illegible] while her lord (Dorset) sat working;
& ~~then~~ years later again, in the days of her loneliness & unhappiness,
~~she returned to Chaucer, &~~ she returned to her Chaucer again,
saying ~~as~~ as none but a true lover of ~~poetry~~ books would
say "If I had not excellent Chaucer's book here to
197 comfort me, I were in a pitiable case, having so
many troubles as I have here, but, when I read in that, I
scorn & make light of them all, & a little part of his
beauteous spirit infuses itself ~~to~~ in me!"
Chaucer & Spenser & Ben Jonson & Montaigne ~~or the Bible~~ or
~~Josephus~~ together with the Bible, & Josephus & some old histories &
family chronicles make up the staple of her reading.
The greater part of her time went in business of an active
kind. She was imbued with all her the passion of her age
for possessions. She was the most ~~[illegible]~~ obdurate stickler
for her rights. The natural passion of her life was to
travel about, often over roads that a coach had not yet
passed, from one Northern Castle to another. "Family life,
its greeds, its anxieties, its ambitions, the duties ~~of~~ of Landlords
~~towards~~ to tenants, the repairing of houses, the exacting of
Dues - all the troubles & turmoils that afflicted a
widow lady who insisted upon being the sole mistress
⊕ of vast Northern territories & in preserving them
entire for her descendants - absorbed her. But still -
she read; she had sentences copied out & pinned upon her
walls, even as Montaigne himself did; & although all
her interests were active, & the temper of her own mind
much more akin to that of a general or statesman
than that of a blue stocking, she still kept

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kept — & this is all the more impressive because she was the last
person to set up a salon, or draw round her, even when she lived
at Knole or at Wilton the learned & the witty ~~or the~~ —
a stalwart & natural sense of the value of poetry, of the
respect which it was right for the heiress of half Westmoreland
to pay to people of no birth or fortune who could yet
write the Canterbury Tales, or the Faery Queen. As a
matter of course she paid for the first monument to Spenser in
Westminster Abbey. She raised too a tomb to her old
tutor Daniel, which, if it commemorates her own virtues &
works, still ~~does honour to her~~ expresses the gratitude she
felt to him.

not like the Css of Pembroke

It was natural that Donne should be sent for to preach
at Knole. But

Such patrons then were not necessarily more degrading
than the ~~corporations which have~~ newspapers & libraries for upon
writers / ~~depend for their living now~~ of they at without private means
must write nowadays. Save perhaps that the tie was
closer & more personal, & that the bribe was not the simple bribe
~~comfortably~~ money, but ~~some~~ the bribe of society, of comfort, of
a seat at the table, of a chair by the ~~fire~~ fireside. to

for

Donne, living & in a ~~cottage~~ comfortless house at Mitcham
where walls were so thin that they let through every sound,
the comfort & the ease ~~that Lady Bedford~~ of
Twickenham ~~where to the Countess of Bedford~~ must have been
irresistible. ~~The Countess of Bedford could only be~~
~~[illegible]~~ The Countess of Bedford ~~offered him not only~~
was not merely a patron who might pay for a
dedication in hard cash; she was also a woman,
whose charm, whose wit, whose virtue, as she
moved among her people in her garden, in her great
rooms, had to be celebrated in & who provided
luxury, society, ~~that the chance~~ & chance of talk, the
~~possibility of friends~~ : the chance of meeting

in poverty, in the midst of a large family

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people with gifts in their disposal; & ~~it was to~~ for this she could only
be paid by those singular poems, ~~half~~ in which adulation is
mixed with ~~the nobler & warmer feeling~~ the ~~age~~ that ~~a~~
~~man has for a woman, that a~~ something nobler &
warmer. A relation sprang up between them,
if we suppose that the poems — Twickenham Garden &
St Lucies day were addressed to her which was
reverent ~~& affectionate, & even~~ yet passionate, & at the
~~same time~~ controlled & ornate, ~~as if~~ & then again
in the letters openly addressed to her, becomes formal &
ornate & full of extreme & cold superlatives; ~~as if~~,
~~though he might~~ so that ~~we~~ ~~sometimes~~ ~~praise the~~
where all is hidden we sometimes feel that ~~nothing~~
~~the~~ nothing ~~be~~ but gratitude to the generous lady.
who snatched Donne from his the squalor of his
own home, & sometimes deplore the fact that she
could exact or accept such ~~the relation which~~
bred ~~such poems as Twickenham Garden, or~~
women ~~who~~ inspired such poems as T. Garden, or
The Autumnal were at
& inspired him to write ~~as~~ the Autumnal &
T. G. & St Lucies day, & sometimes wish that he
could have been left to fend for himself, in the
dangerously noisy house at Mitcham, & the dingy lodging
room over the vault in the Strand so that we
could have had more satiric upon aging women ~~more~~ love poems &
less of & fewer upon knights & great ladies panegyrics. Even so, ~~when~~ the
the openness of the pagan flattery does away with
part of the evil, for ~~charity~~ ~~much~~ when common
when so much ~~of the~~ ~~was~~ of the flattery was an ingenious
form, had no relation to truth
mind like Donne's could adorn use the theme merely as decorative
~~with~~ impersonal rhetoric, ~~which~~ as if he were Carving
Carving flourishes to order, while lavish
all his ~~[illegible]~~ coldly impersonally without

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himself deeply to the importunate, ~~which left~~ him free to insinuate ~~into the crevices~~ as a great deal of thought — passion & poetry ~~even~~ into the crevices even of his most incredible paeans. ~~And the we can never be sure how far~~ ~~And with a mind so~~ And even when ~~boredom & disgust~~ at the extravagance at the ~~ex~~ frigidity at the lack of taste drive us to a frenzy of boredom, still one never knows — the his reverence so swiftly becomes satiric, his hyperbole so suddenly changes to ~~perfect~~ sober passion; & ~~as~~ ~~for~~ the one thing certain is that ~~a mind~~ whatever harm Donne did himself by taking money here, & lodging there, & putting himself in the pay of Great the great, ~~his~~ the very qualities we admire in Donne — his curiosity, his vitality, his were responsible at fault. ~~Simplicity~~ The simple & the good seldom give us the same pleasure as the complex & imperfect writer. And ~~the same of his mind~~ without his

To have shut him up at Mitcham was impossible. He had to pass through these whirlpools & ~~[illegible]~~ shoot these shallows before, at last, he issued out into his last pinnacle, his ~~curiosities~~ & climbed to that highest station & became that venerable figure the Dean of St Pauls;

That he was always seeking something.

That Donne was always seeking something: That is the reason, perhaps, why in transitional ages, like our own, he has so great a power of exciting attention.

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As his life ended in the sacred precincts Sanctuary of St Pauls a Dean of the Protestant Church, so his book that began with satires & love songs ends with a section of Divine Poems. But when we read them, are we convinced that ~~the~~ he had found what he sought, or can we be sure that we know what he had found? are we convinced that here is ~~an~~ the end, – that this unstable & capricious & many-coloured nature has found anchorage, – & if so, can we understand from his own account what ~~that~~ end is, ~~that answer to~~ what the answer is, what the anchor is to which at last he has tethered his violent, ambitious, lustful, amorous, & highly ingenious & intolerant & sceptical & sneering & at the same time profoundly sincere nature? In some of the love poems, notably in the Ecstasie, there are ~~intimations~~ traces of calm, seasons when the battle seems to cease, & ~~the~~ an And victory to be won. to it had happened for a moment when – his lover & he had sat on a bank, one day holding hands. ~~There~~ Their souls had gone out & held negotiation:

And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
And wee said nothing, all the day.

In this Extasie they saw that what they loved was not sex;
& when love, with one another so

But O, alas,
the soul ~~he~~ breaks off,
~~W~~But O alas . . .

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Those ~~who love another person human being~~
Was Donne's love of God of the same nature as the love of the
race that ~~when~~ the Ecstasie was not broken in upon by
the Great Prince who urgently demands of ~~lovers~~ human
lovers that they shall love with the body as well as with the
soul? Did he have seasons of calm
~~What was his relation with~~ God? ~~He~~

than
their
love

Was he ever more silent; did he somehow achieve that
state ~~to which he sometimes refers as~~ of being 'all minde'
of bringing ~~all~~ his sins to the ~~fi~~ central fire &
seeing them consumed? Was his 'little world'

" Little world made cunningly
Of Elements"

~~burnt up~~ ~~drowned~~, — or burnt up for "

" ~~alas the~~ "alas the fire
Of lust & envie have burnt it heretofore".

~~burnt~~ & did none of those old demons still ~~persist~~ — survive to make ~~laugh &~~ the Dean, in the privacy of his chamber, ~~make~~ daily merry profanely, with the old doubts, the old desires, of his unregenerate days?

The divine poems express much ecstasy, but also much agony. ~~Rest & Certainty~~ The rest, the calm certainty of poets like Vaughan & George Herbert do not ~~seem far fr to descend~~ him.

dwells
in them·

In the ~~story~~ famous story of his preparation for death, there is an elaboration, a deliberation, a care for appearances which suggest that Donne did not

They still strive, ~~they they they still seem to struggle, to~~ & struggle in their convulsive effort to ~~achieve~~ attain harmony. And the famous preparations that

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Donne made when he felt death coming, ~~[illegible]~~ are poles asunder from the ~~[illegible]~~ falling asleep of the tired, & content. He must still cut a figure, assume a pose, ~~&~~ stand erect, carved in stone, with his grave clothes drawn tightly about his emaciated body, & his face tortured still tortured twisted, rapt in an ecstasy but tortured & agonised. And For no easy road led from the bold sensual face of the boy of eighteen to this emaciated effigy; & doubtless at ~~[illegible]~~ least because, there was no end & no [illegible] stage & no rest for such as him; & ~~no answer, & no~~ &, as we trace the outline of that strange pilgrimage that turned the bold sensual boy of the early portrait to this frozen but most expressive corpse, we realise that one ~~&~~ reason why we read Donne still is that he never acquiesced, never stagnated, never ~~even when he~~ lay down with the herd to sleep. When the fire of London destroyed ~~every~~ almost every ~~thing~~ other monument in St Pauls, it left Donne's figure untouched — ~~a riddle,~~ a as if ~~it~~ the flames too could not untie that knot, dissolve that ~~myriad~~ multitudinous composition, or read that ~~insoluble~~ mystery.

Sept. 22nd

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1931
Oct. 29th

Some Elizabethans.

1574-5

There are few greater delights than to go back
three or four hundred years & become, in
fancy at least, an Elizabethan. That such
fancies are only fancies, that we ~~only~~ can only
become Elizabethan artificially superficially, sentimentally,
& ~~very~~ on the surface ~~artificially~~ is no doubt true; — time has
set another stamp on us — still the ~~wish~~
instinct for to make the attempt is so strong, the wonder & pleasure so
~~great~~ of the adventure so great that we
cannot ~~be~~ help risking it, for all its absurdity.
To ~~speak~~ ~~thus of the~~ Elizabethan poetry as if it were a
strange land, in which we go doubting our way,
~~Disguised~~ embarrassed, amused, ~~And we~~
need not become an Elizabethan in order to read the
poetry. But this applies much more to the
prose than to the poetry. ~~The poet plays~~
~~poetry of Shakespeare is much easier to understand~~
~~than the prose of Donne.~~ We are not ~~conscious~~
~~of entering a strange land, where~~ made to feel
that we are strangers, ~~people~~ of different speech & different
habits, when we read Shakespeare. Indeed it is
curious how very little Shakespeare tells us about the
daily life of his time — from one page of a modern
novel posterity will know much more about the
~~facts of life~~ daily life ~~under~~ in the time George the 5th than we
learn of Elizabethan life from all Shakespeare's
plays. Prose is the repository of those

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little details. It is in prose that the man in his boots, his breeches, with his moustache, or his beard, his signet ring, his tobacco pouch, his waistcoat, plain or coloured, his pockets full of string, coins, & old letters, his watch, his penknife, his latch key & his driving licence are miraculously preserved. It is these things that become obsolete & unfamiliar. ~~What~~ Poetry ~~preserves is~~ of course preserves something ~~much more~~ very difficult to understand, but something not because it has ~~become~~ grown obsolete — rather because it lies so deep within us that it never changes.

The difficulty of the prose is that it had not to preserve these details naturally. Hence its charm. We preserve simply. Dunne prose.